

## JONATHAN EDWARDS.

Continued from page 1.

was what the Great Awakening accomplished."

The name of Jonathan Edwards is on the roll of Presidents of Princeton College, succeeding that of his son-in-law, Rev. Aaron Burr; but he went to Princeton only to die. His active service in behalf of the college could not have been more than four or five weeks, and yet Dr. McLean's history says: "The power of his name for good is felt by the college to this day. Probably no man ever connected with the institution has contributed so much to the reputation of the college, both at home and abroad."

During his illness "he was an admirable instance of patience and resignation to the last. Just at the close of life, as some who stood by were lamenting his departure, not only as a great gloom upon the college, but as having a dark aspect for the interests of religion in general, to their surprise, not imagining that he heard or would ever speak another word, he said, 'Trust in God; ye need not fear.'" These were his last words. So he lived and labored and died: Jonathan Edwards, mystic, preacher and theologian.

I have no intention this morning of analyzing President Edwards' theology, nor attempting to separate the permanent from the transient in his system of thought. I only wish to use one element of his preaching in illustration of our text. For this I well remember that, as a boy, I have trembled at the reading of some of his sermons. He has given me a heavy and a fearful heart more than once. And I imagine that the popular conception, i. e., the general, undiscriminating idea, of Edwards is of a man deeply versed in "the terrors of the Lord." You have probably heard the story of his sermon on "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"—how the congregation clutched the pews in terror, and how a clergyman who was with him in the pulpit cried out, "Brother Edwards, Brother Edwards, isn't God merciful?" That sermon said: "The God that holds you over the pit of hell—much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire—abhors you and is dreadfully provoked; His wrath towards you burns like fire; He is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in His sight; you are ten thousand times as abominable in His eyes as the most hateful and venomous serpent in the universe. When God beholds the ineffable extremity of your case, and sees how your poor soul is crushed and sinks down, as it were, into an infinite gloom, He will have no compassion on you. He will not forget the execution of His wrath, or in the least lighten His hand; there shall be no moderation or mercy, nor will God then at all stay His rough hand; He will have no regard to your welfare, nor be at all careful lest you should suffer too much, in any other sense than only that you should not suffer beyond what strict justice requires; nothing shall be withheld because it is so hard for you to bear."

This was terrible preaching. Some of his other subjects were: "The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners;" "The Future Punishment of the Wicked Unavoidable and Intolerable;" "The Eternity of Hell Torments;" and he regarded these themes as so essential that, if they were denied, the foundations not only of Christian belief, but of common morality, would be overthrown. But to understand and appreciate Jonathan Edwards, and his position, we must recall the historic background and environment. That was a hard age—"the iron age" of theology, we might call it. The Church was hard. Some one has said: "There was but one rock in Plymouth Bay, and the Pilgrims drew their boats beak to it as they possessed the land." There was in Puritanism much of hardness and sternness, little of playfulness and joy; "a Sabbath view of life and a Spartan view of duty." The Puritan was severe, unbending, rigorous. His faith, like his church, was harsh. His God, like his soul, was hard. We live in a time which finds in this grim and sober past an object, for the most part, either of amusement or contempt. But neither view is worthy of the subject or of us. The spirit of Puritanism was great and did great things for our country, for the spirit was larger than the letter. Like the rigorous system of Judaism, like the Old Testament, it was a preparation for better things. We may well ask: What this country would be like today were it not for the traditions and influence of the Puritan: for the rugged foundation stones that he laid. The blossoms of the present have their roots in that stern past. If the Puritan was hard, it was because his life was hard, and he accepted the hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. He knew but one law of life—the law of righteousness; he had but one authority—his conscience; if his faith was harsh, it was also bracing. If his God was hard, He was still a God who made man to do his duty when that duty was also hard.

The stability of the republic rests where the Pilgrims planted it, on the rock of a national conscience; and the only secure coast of defense is along the line of the stern and rock-bound coast of righteousness.

Jonathan Edwards was pre-eminently a preacher of righteousness. He unconsciously declared the awfulness of sin and the Divine wrath against it. It was as if one of the old prophets had risen again; and he defended his imprecatory sermons on the ground that if such things were true, it was a kindness to declare it in the most effective manner possible. His heroic and often terrible style of preaching, then, was in accord with the spirit of the times. The historian Bancroft says: "He that would honor the workings of the New England mind in the middle of the eighteenth century, and the throbbing of its heart, must give his days and nights to the study of Jonathan Edwards." But when we come to our own times—the beginning of the twentieth century—we find a vast change: (1) a change in the methods of preaching; (2) a change in man's thought and attitude toward God. One never hears such preaching as that of Edwards; and if one did, the mature mind would not be affected by it. There is that double change.

And there are some who think that this is retrogression; that we are falling behind the fathers; that the majesty of God is imperiled if not impaired; and that religion is losing the strength of its hold upon men. But when we examine closely, we find that righteousness is still preached in the great congregation; God is still exalted and magnified as Sovereign; sin is still denounced; eternal punishment is still believed. And it

would seem that the essence of the change, after all, the loss, if it be a loss, is that fear is no longer appealed to as a leading motive to righteousness. A recent writer has said: "Fear has practically ceased to be an influential factor in religion. Preachers are no longer accustomed to appeal to it as a motive, because such appeal is found to be useless. The modern man cannot be scared by the thought of death or of the judgment; and if he could be, the modern code would require him to conceal his terror."

And without attributing this to hardness of heart, or to laxity of belief, there is abundant reason for the decay of religious life in the influence that are moulding this age, in the progress of the world, and the place of supremacy that man occupies.

In the natural progress of the race toward manhood and self-reliance, fear has waned. The brutes are subject to unreasoning fear; the boy is afraid of much that man laughs at; the heathen are in a state of terror at much that we understand perfectly. As civilization progresses, the realm of fear diminishes, so that one of the latest works on psychology says: "In civilized life it has at last become possible for large numbers of people to pass from the cradle to the grave without ever having had a pang of genuine fear." The Puritans believed in witches and magic, and were insecure and fearful in consequence. Nature was long thought to be the abode of malicious and capricious powers that could not be counted upon. Time was when comets and earthquakes, storms and pestilence, and even "warts and moles and monstrous growth," were full of mystic terror for mankind. But in latter days men have learned to know and have ceased to tremble. Fantastic fears and unreasoning presentiments have vanished. Terror has fought a losing battle with man's intelligence and growth, and has been routed.

This, of fear in general, and its passing away by the development of understanding and knowledge. But it is inevitable that this condition should react upon a man's religion and influence it. There has been, as it were, a change in the human material, in the very fibre and quality of manhood; and it must affect the whole life, change one's thought of God, and alter the motives of obedience.

To say that this is wrong is to change the whole progress of the world, and really to degrade God, as if man was oversteering and overreaching God. To lament the effect is to distrust cause, which is surely of God's purpose. The better way is to have confidence in the forces which are leading to a higher civilization, as forces that will make for righteousness. It may be that the casting out of fear is the road that leads to the perfect love of God.

But we must at least realize the peril of the situation. Self-reliance is beset by dangers. It is akin to pride and the haughty spirit that go before destruction and a fall. It reverence goes away with fear, the last state of a man will be worse than his first.

Religion must therefore adjust herself to the change, and with the loss of the older motives, must ply the persuasives that still have force. Religious zeal used to enforce the supremacy of Christ by compulsion, and called in the rack, the stake and fagot. But now we know that Christ can enforce His own supremacy, that He has the power to draw all men to Him, if only He be lifted up, crucified for them. Love has more compulsion than fear has. Hence the increasing emphasis that religion lays on love in these days. It seeks to persuade men, not to drive them. It "beholds them in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God."

There is no doubt that this is progress, and progress in the right direction. The whole trend of the Divine Revelation is in this line. The Bible moves steadily away from arbitrary commands to reason, away from laws to principles, away from fear to love. It begins with commands, as is necessary in all training; but commands are not its final form. "The law was a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ," with His own command of love. Even in the Old Testament, the appeal to reason flashes out more than once. "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." And the consummation is found in the New Testament, where it is written, "I beseech you, therefore, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, for this is your reasonable service." How precisely, then, St. Paul uses "the fear of the Lord" in the text. Notice the peculiar expression: "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord—we drive men? or frighten them? appeal to their fear and try to alarm them? No, we persuade them. By argument and every art of persuasion we try to induce them to flee from the wrath of God, that they may never have to cry in terror to the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb.

The "wrath of the Lamb" is an awful thing. The terror of the Lord is in the Revelation as an eternal reality. It is the New Testament that says: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." "Our God is a consuming fire." We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that "every one may receive according to the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or bad."

Paul knew this terror of the Lord, and it led him to "warn every man day and night with tears." Christ knew it, and it led Him to weep over Jerusalem and say, "Ye will not come to Me that ye may have light." The true use of these awful realities is not for declamation, not to terrify the soul; but for tender exhortation and earnest beseeching. "Trust in God and ye need not fear," said Edwards at the last.

But, ah, see that ye refuse not the still small voice of entreaty. John the Baptist came of old, neither eating nor drinking, stern, unbending, with the trumpet of Sinai, and the people said, "He hath a devil." The Son of Man came eating and drinking, the gentle friend, the tender Saviour, and they said, "Behold a glutton and a wine bibber." Such terrible inequalities! Let us not fall into like condemnation, if the thunders of the law do not move us, let us listen at least to the voice of Jesus, whose blood speaks better things than that of Abel. The Gospel has now no other power than persuasion; no other compulsion than love. Jesus invites you. He died that you might be delivered from judgment and death. Let His love constrain you, and

thus judge that if one died for all then all died, and that He died for all, that they who live should not live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again. Amen.

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